

# WOMEN'S INSTITUTES



CICELY McCALL



## WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

by

Cicely McCall

THE wide-spread growth of the Women's Institutes throughout the whole countryside is one of the most interesting and remarkable characteristics of present-day social life in England. Twenty-six years ago the first Institute opened in Anglesey; now there must be nearly six thousand throughout the land. It is not too much to say that the coming of the Institute has brought a new and enterprising spirit into the life of our villages. It has given our countrywomen new opportunities of being together and enjoying being together in a way which did not exist before. The multifarious activities of the Institute in peace and war are fully described by Miss Cicely McCall, who has had experience of Institutes all over the country. She gives a lively and stimulating picture of their place in village life to-day and in the much discussed village of to-morrow.

# Lady Denman, G.B.E.

## 1884-1954



By

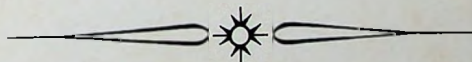
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'LADY DENMAN is the Institutes. We can't think of them apart from her.' Such were the words in which a Gloucestershire Institute expressed the general feeling when, in 1946, Lady Denman resigned the Chairmanship of the National Federation which she had held for close on thirty years, during which the Movement grew, under her

inspiring leadership, from infancy to full stature as one of the outstanding women's organisations of our age.

In Lady Denman's life, to be published in March, the author, an old friend, reveals how her early years and upbringing, her apprenticeship with the Women's Liberal Federation, her experience of high office as the 26-year-old wife of the Governor-General of Australia, and the joys and sorrows of her private life all helped to mould her character; and the story shows how and why that remarkable and lovable character so deeply impressed itself on the whole Women's Institute Movement, to which, amongst much other important public work, she gave her longest and most notable services.

Older Institute members who remember Lady Denman with pride and affection, as well as younger members, will all want to read in this charming and absorbing book the full and intimate life story of the leader to whom their Movement owes so great a debt.



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# WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

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CICELY McCALL

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WITH  
8 PLATES IN COLOUR  
AND  
22 ILLUSTRATIONS IN  
BLACK & WHITE



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Made by a member of a Yorkshire Institute.

#### THRIFT RUG

Made from vegetable dyed woollen scraps by a member of a Shropshire Institute.

#### PAGE PAINTED BY A MEMBER OF A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

From a book illuminated by members of Women's Institutes and presented to their  
Chairman, Lady Denman, D.B.E., June, 1937

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A CANNING DEMONSTRATION AT A WOMEN'S INSTITUTE MEETING  
Oil painting by Evelyn Dunbar

### THE INSTITUTES COME TO LONDON

ONCE a year on a day in midsummer, pre-war London was invaded by nine thousand countrywomen. They came from remote border villages in Northumberland, from mountain villages in Wales, from fruit-growing districts in Worcestershire, from Devon moors and from the Kent coast. They represented every third village in England and Wales and over three hundred thousand fellow members of the women's institutes. This was their big day of the year, the Annual General Meeting.

All London knew about it, for every bus and tube was full of excited bewildered delegates.

"Can you tell me the way to the Empress Hall, Earl's Court, please?"

"Oh! you're one of them too? Must be a big show on. What's it all about?" said the conductor as he helped a rather stout and freely perspiring lady on to the kerb. She was a middle aged woman from Somerset. She had refused to

come for many years because she'd heard tell they don't even say good-mornin' to you up there. But here she was now, rather breathless and much relieved that her worst fears had not been realised. Two people sitting next her in the bus had been wearing the women's institute badge and they had said good morning and smiled at once. In fact everyone smiled when she asked for Earl's Court. They all seemed to know about it.

One of her fellow passengers didn't look more than seventeen. She said she came from Cumberland and that this was her first visit to London. She didn't add that since her railway ticket had been given to her a month before she had slept with it under her pillow every night.

"There's Miss Brown ! She spoke at our institute last year. Well, fancy !"

But people were hurrying in and one couldn't wait too long gossiping. True the meeting did not begin for another hour, but it was best to be in good time, just in case. Cumberland and Somerset took their places in the queue, were reluctantly parted by a smiling steward who explained that seats were arranged by counties alphabetically, and at last sank exhausted into their places.

Mrs. Somerset looked round. A few rows back a large placard gave the name of her county. There were some ninety seats in her block. Further back a familiar hat caught her attention. Of course that was Lady S . . . from the Hall, looking just like she did in church. Beside her was the postmistress from the next village where they had that big institute that got up the play. However had she managed to get away ? Then beyond her was the red-headed girl who had spoken at the last county annual meeting.

Mrs. Somerset looked past her block and read the next placard.

"West Suffolk. Why that's where me sister's girl's working. I wonder if anyone knows her." And greatly daring, she walked over to the Suffolk delegates to enquire.

Meanwhile Miss Cumberland was also having a look round. She found Dorset just behind her and Devon beyond. Looking to the left in the seats above she could read, "Bucks, Berks, Cambridgeshire and Cheshire." More delegates were coming in every minute. Stewards in cream overalls and broad green and red ribbons across one shoulder stood in the gangways and on the stairs directing fresh arrivals. One of them was adjusting the microphone.

"Can you hear me ?" she asked, standing in front of the lectern.

"Yes" came back in a roar from fifty counties and as many loudspeakers. The official looked somewhat abashed and a laugh rippled round the hall. Miss Cumberland laughed too and forgot her shyness.

It was time for the meeting to begin.

"There's Lady Denman" whispered some hundreds to their less well informed neighbours. Lady Denman, chairman of the national federation since institutes first began, walked on to the platform at the head of the executive committee. Delegates craned their necks trying to see a familiar face, someone from their own county or someone they had once heard speak. But for most of the delegates the platform was a long way off and the figures indistinguishable.





A YORKSHIRE VILLAGE: LEYBURN MARKET PLACE

Water colour by Henry Rushbury

Henry Rushbury 1942

By courtesy of the Artist



EVACUEES  
Oil painting by Leila Faithful

*By courtesy of the Artist and C.E.M.A.*



Like all county and national women's institute meetings and a great number of smaller meetings too, the Earl's Court meeting opened with the singing of Blake's "Jerusalem." One member of the executive conducted it and nine thousand voices sang it. They sang it triumphantly.

"Bring me my bow of burning gold !  
Bring me my arrows of desire !  
Bring me my spear ! O clouds unfold  
Bring me my chariot of fire !"

Many of them had sung it in their own village hall every month at their institute meeting since first they joined, perhaps ten or fifteen years ago. They had sung it to the accompaniment of a battered piano, untuned and much ill used. Yet always with the feeling that here was inspiration, even if one couldn't quite understand what all the words meant. On this hot summer morning in Earl's Court there were village women from all over England and Wales singing it fervently as a vow freshly taken.

"I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land."

This was June 1939. England was still at peace.

In this year only a few months after Munich, only three months before the invasion of Poland, the Associated Countrywomen of the World, the international body which binds together Women's Institutes all over the world, had held a week of meetings in London. Twenty-three countries had been represented, and nine of these representatives came to Earl's Court. One by one they were called to the front of the platform. Some wore national dress. Some neither spoke nor understood English. But all of them understood the applause and the smiles which greeted each fresh announcement.

America, Sweden, India. One by one they came forward, made their bow, and sometimes said a few words.

Latvia, Norway, . . . Germany !

She was a tall woman. Her shoulders were flung back, her face set as she stepped on to the platform. There was a second's tense silence, as though suddenly nine thousand pairs of lungs had contracted, and their hearts too. Then came deafening applause. It rang round the hall tumultuously. It fell, then grew again in increasing volume as though each perspiring delegate on that very hot June morning could not enough say :

"Welcome ! We are all countrywomen here to-day. We are non-party, non-sectarian. We wish for peace, goodwill and co-operation among nations. You have had the courage to come here in spite of rumours of wars. We bid you welcome !"

The strained look had gone from the German delegate's face. Amazement had taken its place. Amazement and pleasure. As she stepped off the platform

she hesitated, almost stumbled. Perhaps she could not see very well. We shall never know what message she carried back to her country when her eyes were dried. Now, in this fourth year of war, is she still alive? Does she remember?

The rest of the meeting followed the usual course of annual meetings. A cabinet minister addressed the assembly. Resolutions ranged from a demand for cheap electricity for villages to the need for rear lights for cyclists. Speeches varied from the confidently expert to the totally inaudible, and delegates got hotter and hotter. Yet they listened carefully to those speakers, and shallow arguments received scant sympathy from the audience. This was the day on which future policy depended. No rule could be changed without the consent of the institutes' representatives. It was for the institutes to give or withhold fresh mandates on public questions, and each delegate had been carefully instructed by her fellow members.

Shortly after four o'clock the meeting ended. 93.5% of the institutes had been represented. It was the last annual meeting before the war. None has been held since.

### THE INSTITUTES AT HOME

**I**N the 22 years since the first annual general meeting was held, the numbers of members attending has increased from 200 to 9,000, and the number of institutes which they represent has grown from 137 to 5,839.

Women's institutes were founded on faith, principally the faith of Mrs. Alfred Watt and Mr. Nugent Harris's belief in her. It was Mrs. Watt's persistence which in the face of discouragement and indifference inspired a small group of men and women working in the Agricultural Organisation Society, to try out an institute in Anglesey. Mrs. Watt came from Canada. She had seen the success of institutes there where they had been founded as the counterpart of the Canadian farmers' clubs. She maintained that their non-party, non-sectarian basis had brought together people whose opposing views had hitherto made any communal life, work or fun impossible.

"If you can succeed in bringing women together in Llanfair," one of the founders is reputed to have said acidly, "you can succeed anywhere." It did succeed. And Llanfair (Anglesey) women's institute to-day has a photograph in its hall of those pioneers who were brought together and stayed together amicably.

Women's institutes were founded on faith. For the first two years of their life their material resources were negligible. Each member paid (and in 1943 still pays) two shillings a year. Of this, twopence went to the central organisation which was responsible for the inspiration and stimulus of a new, fast growing movement. In 1917 the movement was taken under the wing of the Board of Agriculture and a year later the first government grant was made by the Development Commissioners. It was £2,000. The following year it was raised to five times that sum, thus creating a precedent which has been followed sometimes in





MICHAELMAS FAIR, ABINGDON, BERKSHIRE  
Water colour by Charles Cundall

moral support and sometimes in financial by other government departments. Twenty years later the Ministry of Food called upon women's institutes to give their help in preserving fruit from the hedgerows and small gardens. The next year, 1941, the same Ministry asked the institutes to organise a scheme of fruit preservation which implied more than five times the burden for W.I. staff and members, and, on the part of the government, a corresponding amount of confidence in institute efficiency. The Ministry gave the Federation its financial backing. In return for its trust in W.I. willingness to give hard work for no individual profits and much public criticism, the Ministry was able to add to the national store cupboard over 1,764 tons of preserved fruit either bottled or made into jam.

Institutes, though only too willing to co-operate with government departments in national work, are in no way dependent on the government for their views or their policy. This is where they differ from the Scottish Rural Women's Institutes. Government generosity and appreciation put them on their feet with those first two grants from the Development Commissioners. The 1919 grant of £10,000

was made on the understanding that each successive year for ten years a diminishing grant should be made until finally the institutes became financially independent. In 1927, a year before the ten years were up, the institutes felt sufficiently firmly established to be able to thank the Commissioners kindly and return their grant. Surely such an action has never been taken by any other voluntary body before or since !

Women's institute faith had been justified. Institutes appeared in novels and on the stage. Their doings were regularly recorded in the local press. They had become part of country life and often the only bright part in the lives of thousands of countrywomen.

In twenty-five years institutes have given countrywomen an opportunity of meeting together and enjoying being together in a way which did not exist before. Not that country life has ever been unsociable. We all know too much about each other and each other's families and peculiarities to be anything but intensely mutually interested. But country life twenty-five years ago provided no opportunity for women to meet together in any numbers. There were no opportunities, except for the specially talented individual, to learn about music or drama. There was no wireless in those days. By the time wireless sets had become a commonplace in almost every cottage, the women, and sometimes the men, had had an opportunity for many years of joining in county drama competitions and inter-county choral festivals. Women who had never been to a theatre or concert had taken part in Shakespeare plays and sung in a massed choir. More than that, they had loved it. Their performance had been good, and to them, unforgettable.

For the last five years, some two hundred and seventy institute meetings in England and Wales have been held every day of the year except Saturdays and Sundays. At some there are between a hundred and fifty to two hundred women. The meetings may be held in a hall owned and built by the institute. The president and officers sit on a platform and the rest of the members sit on rows of chairs bought, after many jumble sales and dramatic entertainments, by the members. At others there are under twenty members. They meet in the school, squeezing laughingly behind infants' desks; or in one of the members' kitchens or sitting-rooms where they all sit round the fire.

But whether the meeting is held in W.I. hall or farm kitchen, the procedure is the same. The business is conducted by the officers and all decisions are taken by vote of the members. There is a chairman, called rather misleadingly a president, although there is nothing of the patroness about her position. Officers and committee members are elected annually by secret ballot. Institutes have seen too much of the show of hands method of voting to want to have it at their own meetings. Voting by show of hands is still used at parish council elections. Its results are well known. Mrs. Smith holds up her hand because Mrs. Brown who is next to her has held up hers and it doesn't seem friendly not to. And Mr. Brown holds up his hand because the candidate is his employer and is sitting on the platform looking at him. No. Institutes use a secret ballot at their elections. If they had their way secret ballots would be used at every parish council meeting too.





A WOMEN'S INSTITUTE WORKING PARTY  
Wash drawing by E. D. Hewland

Institutes meet once a month and the meeting lasts about two and a half hours. The minutes are read by the secretary who has been elected by her committee. Much of the responsibility for the well-being of the institute falls on this officer, and all honour is due to these busy countrywomen who undertake the work often in much trepidation.

"Oh! I couldn't stand up and *read* them. I don't mind *writing* them—if you'll help me," a new secretary will say. Every month she will conscientiously write those minutes immediately after the meeting, just as she was told, but in the early days of institutes it used sometimes to take months of persuasion before she would read them. Nowadays shyness is not so prevalent and most secretaries would be insulted if their minutes were read for them. There are still some, however, who read them in one long lung-bursting breath.

The treasurer is also elected annually by the committee. It is much easier to find a treasurer in a village, however small, than one would suppose. Perhaps since thriftiness is the special perquisite of the good countrywoman, financial responsibility is a thing which she is not unwilling to shoulder. True to her profession, many W.I. treasurers quickly develop a tendency to hoard, although before their appointment they may have been quite normal generous-minded people. But then Treasury officials may once have been generous-minded, too.

Institute accounts have to be passed by an accredited auditor and also, of course, by the members at their annual meeting. The great majority of institute treasurers submit a budget for next year's expenses at the same time. There are a few stalwart veterans, however, who say with irrefutable logic :

"How can I say what we are going to spend when I don't know?"

It is useless to quote other institutes or even the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Such literal truthfulness defies modern economic methods.

A treasurer gives a statement of account once a quarter or oftener. Though she may look twice at every penny wrested from her clutches, she has learnt that the treasurer is not the only member who can ask questions. If questions are asked, the average treasurer recognises it as a welcome sign of wakefulness on the part of her audience, and she will not take it amiss.

To answer questions politely about work done is not a thing which comes naturally to all of us. Neither does it always come easy to ask questions politely. Many people either heckle or become painfully on the defensive. Both attitudes may be due to an inferiority complex or to shyness combined with a limited vocabulary. In all democratic organisations members must learn to differ without too much bitterness, to ask and be asked questions without feeling it is a personal affront, and this is what institutes have tried to teach their members. They have learnt that a complaint is not an insult. It is a point of view of another free-thinking, free-speaking individual, and as such has the right to be treated with consideration. And they have learnt that to voice a complaint whether to a fellow member or to the County Council or to the government is the inalienable right of a free people. There is no need to shout it.

A small institute in an eastern county had a grievance. It was a righteous grievance against the new doctor. Unlike his predecessor, he had moved his surgery to a neighbouring village. His patients, unless they walked three miles each way, had to send him a message. There was no telephone.

"It goes in with the milk," the secretary explained, "and then the next day he sends back a bottle of medicine with the milk and we fetch it from The George."

"It's not very nice," the president whispered to the much intrigued speaker, "It's not very nice to have to go to the Public." "And we have to wait two days when all we want is a bo'l of medicine," added the robust secretary. "Tisn't as though there wasn't a nice hall here where he could hold a maternity clinic as well," she continued, warming to her subject.

So, with apologies to the speaker for keeping her, the meeting got down to business. The secretary addressed her fellow members while the president sat with bowed head, her hands folded in her black Sunday frock.

"Well, I've been to all the men," said the secretary bluntly, "and they're all on his panel, bar six, and *they're* on Dr. L . . . 's panel. But they say they'll change, the others do, if he don't make some arrangement better than the milk. They'll all stand by us over that."

"So what we better do is to write him a letter, and what I suggest, madam President," suddenly remembering the Chair and turning to the bent figure





SPINDLE-SPINNING WOOL GATHERED FROM THE HEDGES  
Working party at an East Kent Institute

beside her, "what I suggest is we ask him to come here next month and talk it over." Accordingly a letter was drawn up, couched in courteous but firm terms, saying that Little Muddelcombe Institute would appreciate a visit from Dr. G . . . to discuss the whole situation.

The speaker, who was new to the movement, left that meeting feeling that here was not only the perfect example of democracy at work but of training in citizenship. Without the institute and the training it had given them, none of those women would have known how to set about righting a wrong, unintentional though it might have been. Nor would they have had the courage of action which the corporate spirit of the institute gave them. More important still, the institute had taught them how to make their complaint politely.

Each institute chooses its own programme for its monthly meeting. Choice of subject for study or amusement is not dictated from headquarters. The programme consists of three parts, business, educational and social. The business means the reading of the minutes, the financial statement if the treasurer will oblige, and the reading of the monthly letter sent to each institute by its particular county headquarters. The county letter may give notices about coming county and national meetings ; about fruit trees or vegetable seed to be purchased co-operatively ; about drama festivals organised by W.I. or other bodies ; about new

speakers and demonstrators or government films ; and once a year about the elections of the county and national executives for which each institute votes.

After the business there is a speaker or demonstrator. The subject may be history, cookery, gardening, upholstery, a foreign country, a well known statesman, or knitting. It is not always a domestic subject although institutes are famed for their knowledge and skill of home crafts. Most institutes accept members at fourteen years of age. Others at sixteen. In all institutes there is an increasing demand for accurate information on up-to-date subjects.

"Why can't we have a talk on Russia?" said the wife of a roadman, member of a bleak Chiltern institute. "We're always seeing about it in the Sunday papers."

That was three years ago, when Russia was still considered by many people to be not quite respectable. But the roadman's wife wanted information. Through her institute she could get it.

After the talk there is often a competition to be judged. If the speaker is lucky and the programme well planned it is something to do with her subject. The speaker may be a woman house manager talking on the rebuilding of London, and the competition may be for the best plan of a cottage kitchen. Or a demonstration on vegetable cookery given by a domestic science teacher may be followed by a competition for the best salad.

But sometimes institutes prefer plenty of variety in their monthly meeting, and you may get a talk on Spain and a competition for the best knitted vest. If the speaker is asked to be the judge and is not a knitter then it is just too bad. Sometimes speakers fail at the last moment and the variety may be even more marked. After the talk comes tea. In spite of rationing, tea in most institutes manages to be if not lavish certainly not negligible. Sometimes a kind friend who does not use all her ration supplies the tea. More often every member brings a spoonful periodically and fifty or even twenty spoonfuls last quite a long time. The food is usually pooled. Each member brings enough for herself, bread and butter, cake or biscuit, as she likes, and all contributions are put together by the members acting as hostesses for that month.

Tea and what follows is the third or social part of the programme. It is called the social half hour. In practise it may be a childish game played rowdily for ten minutes before going home, or it may be community singing for forty minutes. It may be an entertainment by the drama enthusiasts of the institute or it may be dancing. Games are nearly always popular with the middle aged. In fact the older the members the more hysterical they become over musical bumps or passing the halfpenny. Younger and more sophisticated people may smile. But if you have been up at six, cooked two or more sets of breakfast for the variously employed grown-up members of the family, sent the children off to school and packed their dinner for them, cooked dinner for the others and washed up afterwards, looked after the fowls, swept the house, fetched the water from the pump ; if you have done this every day for twenty years with no holiday and no difference except that sometimes you're bearing a child, then you deserve a laugh once a month. And if musical bumps is going to give you one, let's have more musical bumps.





MAKING CHUTNEY AT SPRINGFIELD, ESSEX  
A member brings some apples

There are always some members who are content with a sociable monthly meeting and want nothing further. Others realise the potentialities of an organised body of women covering the whole country. They want to use it to get things done. And so it has been used.

In 1927, East Suffolk moved a resolution asking the government for further rural telephone development. A year later the national federation was instrumental in arranging a deputation of members of parliament to the postmaster general. The regulations were altered at once and in a few years a scheme was introduced to provide kiosks in almost every village.

The provision of women police and that vital rural need, the provision of a better water supply, are two more questions which have been championed by institutes, in some counties successfully. Other counties are still carrying on the fight. In 1937 a deputation from the national federation met members of parliament in the House of Commons to press for cheap milk for mothers and babies.

"Why didn't you get your headquarters to write a letter instead of all these institutes writing to me separately?" asked one harrassed Member, waving a sheaf of letters. "Because one letter would have made much less impression," came the prompt reply. Three years later, the Milk Bill was passed. It included all the points for which institutes had asked.

Sometimes the government has asked institutes to help in collecting certain information. In 1937 the national federation was asked to provide sample budgets of agricultural labourers' families for the government report which was published in 1941. This was done through the voluntary county organisers, of whom there are about 500, trained and appointed by the national federation. When information was needed on the adequacy of clothing coupons for land workers the county organisers again provided answers.

In 1942 women's institutes gave evidence before three government appointed committees. A W.I. member sat on the Luxmoore committee and the chairman of the national federation was a member of the Scott committee. The Dudley committee received evidence based on a housing questionnaire sent to every county federation. Each county was asked to distribute this to its institutes and nearly 50 counties did so. The questionnaire met with universal interest. Some counties had found that house planning competitions raised little enthusiasm from members who had never known modern conveniences. Their imaginations would not stretch that far. But the housing questionnaire which asked direct questions—how many rooms would you like on the ground floor? where would you like the bathroom and lavatory?—was answered readily. Members filled in the space for "other points of importance" variously. Some wanted central heating or Aga stoves. Some wanted stainless steel sinks and windows which opened both ways. The answer to a question on communal amenities was invariably "NO," written in capitals. The most desirable distance to live from husband's work and children's school varied from three miles for the hardy Welsh, to half a mile for English members, north or south. Everyone wanted to live in a detached house with a back door away from, not facing her neighbour. Most people were prepared to pay 10/- a week rent on a minimum wage of £3, a surprisingly high figure. The family budget enquiry of 1937 had shown an average rent of 4/9. To-day country people are willing to pay for reasonable comfort.

The Scott report stated emphatically that bad rural housing was one of the causes of the drift to the towns. Institutes have been saying so for years. Every year country people become more conscious of the disparity between urban amenities and rural inconveniences. Fresh air and beautiful scenery do not make up for lack of water, drains and electricity. It is hoped that through the institutes countrywomen will be sufficiently articulate and persistent to make their just complaints ring through the land.

#### DEATH OF A COMPLEX

**M**UCH has been written about evacuation from the point of view of the evacuated child and of the town mother. This chapter is about evacuation as seen by the country mothers who were their hostesses.

Three months after the first September evacuation, the national federation issued a questionnaire to every institute asking for particulars of the evacuee children and adults received in that village. Careful instructions were sent with the questionnaire. The accompanying letter said:





CHILDREN LEAVING LONDON FOR THE COUNTRY  
September 1st, 1939

"The earlier reports as to the condition and habits of a small section of evacuees were of a distressing kind, but it is now being said that such reports were greatly exaggerated.

"Your committee feels that it would be a constructive piece of work if the institutes can give an accurate picture of the condition of the mothers and children when they arrived in the villages. If this is done while the events are still clear in our minds it will be of great value to the authorities who are responsible for the social conditions and health education of the community.

"Such a survey would not be undertaken in a spirit of grievance but as a definite contribution to the welfare of our fellow citizens."

1,700 institutes replied, some very fully. These villages had received children from all the evacuated towns, from London to Gateshead, and in numbers which never corresponded to the number expected.

In some villages even condemned cottages had to be pressed into service and a house to house collection made to furnish them. People gave willingly. Beds and pots and pans were provided for the town visitors. The villagers felt that this was their war effort. No blitz threatened country homes and household possessions, so most of them argued, and they gave freely to the women who had arrived amongst strangers with only what they could carry.

In many villages by the end of the first week, sometimes within twenty-four hours, beds were ruined, cottages stank, pots and pans were burnt, and the village children had head lice for the first time in their lives. The evacuated mothers had returned to their homes, some of them taking pots, pans or blankets with them. Disillusionment was complete.

It would be interesting to know just what mental picture of her expected visitors the average country housewife had built. Big towns are still little known to a large number of busy smallholders' and farm labourers' wives. But towns are the magnet which attract the younger generation of the countryside. The legend that townspeople are smarter, in mental capacity as well as clothes, still persists—or did until evacuation. Countrywomen were conscious of their rough skirts, thick shoes, and broad speech, and compared them unfavourably with the town dwellers' smart hats, patent leather footwear and glib tongues.

That inferiority complex has died a just death. Evacuation has killed it and with a blow which leaves singularly little bitterness for all its finality. Countrywomen know now that many of those town dwellers whom they met at that first evacuation are shiftless and ignorant, not knowing how to cook even the simplest dish nor make the simplest child's garment. The fact that many were bed-wetters and unwashed aroused more pity than anger. What really roused the country mother's indignation was the town mother's inability and lack of desire to train her children. Yet even then the countrywoman's anger was directed far more against the system which produces such ignorance than against the individual.

When the first reports of the insanitary and dishonest habits of evacuees appeared in the press, there were loud protests. People quoted the many honest and estimable town working class families, struggling bravely against impossible odds of bad housing, dirt, and unemployment. In drawing up this survey, the national federation never wished to suggest that all town dwellers compared unfavourably with all country dwellers. But it seemed worth while to record those first impressions, that first shock.

What is most remarkable about the 1,700 answers to the questionnaire is their extraordinary generosity. If an excuse can be found, if an exception exists it is given fair mention. Generosity towards the children is much more marked than towards the mothers. Many evacuated mothers caused serious financial loss to hostesses who could ill afford it. Yet even they come in for their fair share of exoneration.





COTTAGES BY THE VILLAGE POND  
Hovingham, Yorkshire

"We hope from this survey" writes one member, "that the institute movement will lend its influence to some scheme for the improvement of really bad homes."

Sometimes the exceptional good mother is acknowledged more grudgingly. Writing of Liverpool mothers, one institute secretary says :

"They seemed to derive a great deal of pleasure from smoking and frequenting public houses. Of course there was a few exceptions, but it was a few."

A few evacuated mothers settled down happily to country life. Some of them joined the institute and their different outlook added variety and vitality to the meetings. They were an asset to small isolated village communities. The great majority however, torn between responsibility to husband and to children, returned home. Of those who remained, some proved themselves capable housewives and good mothers. But the incompetent housewives and ignorant mothers, though a small minority, were so glaringly incompetent, so shamefully ignorant that no account of evacuation can overstress the black reflection which they cast on our national education. For most of them were young mothers, products of modern elementary education. Many excuses may be made for them. They came from bad housing conditions and they arrived in strange villages where

they knew no one and often found it hard to understand the dialect or make themselves understood. Their clothes were unsuitable for country mud and driving rain. They were frightened of cows, of unlit lanes, of the dark garden path which led to the closet. They missed their friends, their husbands, the familiar street, and sounds and smells. Countrywomen suddenly transplanted into the heart of a big city would have been just as miserable and lonely.

Townswomen have different customs from their country sisters. Going to a public house for a glass of beer or a port and lemon is quite a respectable feminine habit in cities. Not so in the country. If, when they came to a strange village, loneliness drove them to spend more time and money at "the public" than they would have done at home, one can understand the impulse. But the country hostesses were unspeakably shocked. When town mothers left their children to be looked after by their hostesses and came rolling home hilariously after closing hours, then their hostesses were justifiably furious.

One teacher of an elementary school said that she and her fellow teachers had been asked to persuade as many mothers to leave London as possible. They had accordingly told them that it would be a nice holiday and that they needn't stay more than a few days if they didn't want to. "We'd never have got them to come, if we hadn't," she added. So the mothers came for a nice holiday.

If evacuation had taken place in a wet August or a cold November its history might have been quite different. But it was September, gloriously hot and sunny. Just the weather for a perfect holiday. As the mothers and their offspring often remarked, the villagers were being paid by the government to take them in. That made the holiday even more desirable. There was no need to help in the house nor even to make one's bed. No one had instructed them about their obligations to their hostesses. Nor their obligations to a government which for their own safety paid their railway fare and, in the early days, paid their children's board and lodging. Nor, and this was the crux of the matter, had our educational or social system instructed them in the most elementary hygiene.

Such misconceptions and ignorance accounted for a woman who was evacuated with four children under five years of age. A house was furnished for her. Her first question was, "Where's the nearest pictures?" After four days she left. The house, swept and garnished for her arrival, was filthy when she left. The key was found in the outside, unemptied lavatory pan.

"With four or five exceptions," writes a west country institute, hostess to Liverpool evacuees, "the condition and behaviour of mothers with small children sent to this village was such that it is unfair to ask any respectable household to take them in. There was a splendid spirit of willingness and friendliness in the village beforehand and this met with a great shock. The four or five exceptions were a happy example of friendliness and give and take on both sides."

Here again the four or five exceptions get special mention.

"It was felt," writes another institute, "that these mothers came as much as anything for the novelty of a country holiday and did not try to settle down. They soon returned. It is true to say," continues the writer with touching naïveté,





SCHOOL DINNER FOR EVACUATED CHILDREN  
A Reception Area

"there was some carelessness for several beds lent to them had to be burnt."

Much of the survey shows the same hopeful determination to give credit where more sceptical eyes could see little claim to it. Writing of head lice prevalent among so many evacuee children, a midland institute says :

"But as they (the children) had been running the streets for over six weeks and they came hurriedly, no doubt the mothers had not time to clean them as they would have done in time for school in the ordinary way."

It is a sentence full of trustful inaccuracies and unintentional, but none the less devastating, criticism of our social system. Even if it had been true that the mothers would have cleaned the children's heads in time for school, what a reflection on their home life !

The mothers had had the free advice and encouragement of care committee

workers and social workers. But nobody had taught them to delouse their children's heads themselves and keep them deloused. When heads became too obviously overcrowded, the children were sent down the street to the cleansing station. There was no obligation for the mother to be present at the operation, nor to see that they were not immediately reinfected on their return home. One father of an evacuee said "all children bred lice and that it could not be helped." Many mothers were conscious, but quite unmoved by the condition of their children's heads. In the country there are no cleansing stations. If a child has nits (the eggs of lice) the village nurse shows the mother how to treat her child's head and returns in a few days to see how she has got on with it. Town clinics have sapped maternal initiative so that not only care of the head but the most elementary care of the bowels is a matter for immediate consultation with the professional. Many young twenty-year-old evacuees had never dosed their babies themselves. The clinic did that. Without the clinic they were lost. So were the baby's natural functions.

Another art which modern education has failed to teach young mothers is plain sewing. Clothes are cheap in towns in peace time. There is not the same need to make them as there is in a remote country district. But if you are a little boy, the urban way of tearing the seat of your trousers has just the same results as the rural method. The difference is that your mother doesn't, even after a few well chosen words, put a patch on it. She buys another pair.

"One child had no buttons on his trousers and when his mother was given them to sew on she said it didn't matter and she would throw them away," is the comment on one form.

This same mother "had 2, was expecting her 3rd, and she was given a very nice new cottage all to herself and was given as much milk and vegetables as she liked and she stayed 3 weeks and never even emptied her slops all that time."

When all extenuating circumstances have been taken into account—bad housing poverty, overcrowding in smoke ridden cities—it was the parents' indifference to their children's dirt and disease which made an unforgettable impression. Poverty and bad housing no doubt dull finer feelings, and cleanliness in such circumstances is too difficult to be popular. More shame to all of us who have tolerated such conditions.

That is what institute members felt and feel about it. It is true that bad housing is only too well known in the country. Dark cottages, damp walls, ground floors which are flooded every wet season, and leaky roofs—countrywomen know all about these. They know about lack of water, lack of drainage, and lack of almost every labour saving device invented in the last hundred years. But in spite of this, country labourers' sons and daughters as a rule wear strong shoes and clothes with buttons, and their heads and their habits are clean.

Nearly every reception institute had a large number of enuretics in the first batch. A Welsh institute, characteristically looking at the bright side of things, writes: "They were mostly likeable and well behaved children. Nearly all of those who were not soon learnt to be. After a few weeks they learned to be clean."





*By courtesy of the Artist*

EVACUEE PLAY CENTRE  
Oil painting by E. D. Hewland



A CORNISH VILLAGE: LAMORNA  
Water colour by S. J. Lamorna Birch

*By courtesy of the Artist*



After a few weeks. . . ! But what did those first few weeks cost the hostesses ?

"We foster mothers had a bad time at first," writes an institute to which Liverpool children had been sent. "Now that we have got them all clean and into good habits we are all happy together." Extra work to do, extra worry, a billeting allowance which barely covered growing appetities and never covered the clothes which parents should have provided. And yet—"now we are all happy together." After bedding, which was often a total loss, children's clothes proved the greatest expense for the foster mothers. "They arrived in rags," writes another Welsh institute, "insufficient footwear, their clothing without buttons or fastenings. Yet the parents arrived to visit their children in their own motor cars or by motor bus costing 8/- fare or even by taxi."

The same story was repeated all over the country. Foster parents laboriously wrote to the mothers. School representatives visited the home. Meanwhile the children had only the sand shoes in which they had arrived that hot September afternoon and summer frocks and shirts. In hundreds of cases the foster mothers bought and continued to buy suitable country shoes and warm clothes for their small charges. And in many cases the real mother continued to send pocket money, or comic cuts, or sweets, but not vests nor shoes nor socks. One village receiving sixty-eight children found four of them sewn into "pieces of ragged material." Very many had never worn night clothes, and quite a number had never slept in a bed. That was where mum and dad slept. The children slept under it.

'Pieces' (bread and margarine) and fish and chips had been the staple diet of most of the children, though one little girl of five asked for cheese and beer for her supper. Vegetables and puddings were unknown to them. Milk and eggs were looked upon with suspicion. Meat every day was something to be enjoyed certainly, but to be wondered at.

"Here we have Sunday dinner every day," commented one little boy smugly.

"Some refused vegetables as weeds from the garden," writes an institute referring to Manchester children. Another writes that "some had never seen potatoes in their natural form." In other words they had only met potatoes as chips in paper bags. Many children had never seen their mother cook anything. Very many had never used a knife and fork, nor ever sat down to a meal.

The sudden change of diet upset the children at first, but very soon they began to put on weight and institutes tell with pride of their changed appearance. One boy gained 7 lbs. in the first ten days, another a stone in two months. A foster mother writes proudly that she has had to let in side pieces to her little visitor's shirt. Country food was sometimes a matter of concern to the absent mothers as well as her offspring. One mother wrote to complain about the lack of fresh fruit in her child's diet. Her letter arrived when apples and plums were to be had for the trouble of picking them up. But the only "fresh fruit" the mother knew was oranges and bananas.

A few weeks after evacuation, every paper and magazine was full of stories of little boys and girls who learnt for the first time that milk came from "a dirty

old cow, not a nice clean bottle" and that vegetables began their life in the ground, not on a stall. It was a revelation to the children. But it was equally a shock to the country taxpayers who had contributed to national education. Was it possible, country women asked, that even in cookery classes they had learnt no better? *Punch* published a drawing of a little girl who said as she skipped down a lane between flowering hedges, "They call this spring, mum, and they have one down here every year." She was typical of many. Another little girl, a couple of years older, contradicted a widely held urban belief when she said: "There's always something to do in the country, isn't there? You don't have to be naughty."

Country life at first, however, held plenty of opportunity for destruction. Gates were left open, sheep chased, apple trees robbed. Some villages still complain that apple stealing, introduced by the evacuees, has now become a general habit amongst all the village children. Country people are used to destruction from visiting town people, but some of the children surpassed expectations. One group of toddlers, turned loose in a garden in charge of a couple of older girls, came back to their hostess their faces wreathed in smiles and their chubby hands firmly clutching bunches of pretty white flowers. They had picked all the strawberry blossom.

Neither the children nor their mothers seemed to have any idea that farm and garden produce were not accidents of nature for anyone to plunder. They did not realise that fruit and vegetables and poultry represented their owners' livelihood. Town mothers were amazed to learn how hard country housewives have to work. They had never thought about the labour involved in digging a garden, carting wood, and feeding chickens, pigs and rabbits.

A few days after his arrival, one small boy returned to his foster mother with a hen under his arm. "I can get plenty more where this came from," he announced with an engaging smile. He would have known that it was wrong to steal a hammer out of a workman's bag and offer it to his hostess. But it did not occur to him that a hen was part of somebody's stock in trade. He thought it grew wild.

Many country housewives felt that evacuation provided an opportunity to teach town children about the beauties of the countryside. Nothing comes out more clearly in the survey than the countrywoman's intense love of her village and her delight when its beauties were appreciated by her visitors.

"The change from slum streets," writes a northern institute, "to a beautiful village like F. . . and to be suddenly transported to big houses full of luxury and beautiful things and maids, etc., would be very frightening to an average young child and may have helped to be very unsettling for the mothers and children."

The difference in wealth between evacuees and some of their hosts was one of the greatest problems. One could hardly expect a Hull dockside family to be comfortable in a house the size of a royal palace. On the other hand, for want of better accommodation, a child would sometimes be sent to stay with an old age pensioner or a middle aged childless couple who had never wanted to have children. Under such circumstances evacuation could not be expected to be a success. It was unfair to both parties.





EVACUATED CHILDREN WITH THEIR TEACHER  
A Berkshire Village

The uncertainty of how long evacuation would last also militated against success. The country housewife had to accept the child whether she wanted to or not. But the mother could arrive without warning, take the child back with her without so much as seeing the foster mother, and could even re-evacuate the child later if she fancied. On the other hand the child might be in its billet till the end of the war—and after, if the parents disappeared in the interval. The scales were certainly heavily weighted against the reception area.

Some parents were jealous when they found their children absorbed in new surroundings and new friends. The natural reaction was to sweep them back to where they “belonged.” Foster mothers who had stitched and cooked for them and watched them growing round and rosy-cheeked, were left lamenting and often with very little thanks from the real parents.

A Welsh village, receiving Birmingham children, was a happy exception.

“This group of children,” writes the institute secretary, “came into the village with a very good spirit and were almost immediately on friendly terms with all with whom they came into contact. This atmosphere of comradeship has persisted and it is felt that if there is any place where evacuation has been a complete success, it is at Ll. . . .”

It would be interesting to know how much the teachers had to do with that "very good spirit and atmosphere of comradeship." It was an atmosphere which existed more often when teachers were willing to help with children out of school hours, and there were many teachers who gave up their leisure unstintingly to help with games, with scouts and guides and with village activities. Unfortunately there were other teachers who came back to their billets as soon as the school bell rang, and remained there lying in a deck chair or with their feet in front of the fire until it was time to go back again next day. They showed up in ugly contrast to their more public spirited colleagues.

Evacuation has raised in countrywomen's minds problems of education and of housing which meant very little to them before the war. Now they realise that town education and town housing is a national not a local problem. Country teachers need the better equipment which town teachers sadly missed in many reception areas. Country people want many improvements for their cramped, ill-housed schools. But above all we want a national education which will teach boys and girls how to be good citizens and will teach women and girls, town or country, how to be competent housewives and mothers. And for that we want competent, public-spirited, well-informed teachers.

After the war, many of us will look back on evacuation as the greatest, most perplexing social experiment of our life-time. As for the children, some of them will remember it as a period when they were unwanted and misunderstood ; some will remember leaving their foster parents in floods of tears when a jealous mother suddenly swooped down and bore them home. All of them will have learnt something about another side of England.

But hundreds of countrywomen will remember evacuation as the time when they first met with verminous fellow humans of insanitary habits and stinking bodies ; when they first met children who to use the words of one member, "within a few days reduced the play ground to the condition of a stock yard, whose presence in the school room for a few hours upon arrival necessitated thorough fumigation before the room could be used again by the ordinary house-trained village children."

Yet one institute member could still write :

"The children after a few weeks' kindness showed us what lovely natures they had, had they been helped and treated properly."

## JAM

**A**T the beginning of the war, institutes went through a critical phase of their history. Membership dropped alarmingly. Young members left their villages to join the services ; old members became pre-occupied with the First Aid Post or the canteen. Halls were commandeered and demonstrators and speakers difficult to find. Women no longer young found themselves for the first time in their lives without domestic help. Everyone had her house full of evacuees. But many members, often the less vocal section, felt they needed their monthly





PREPARING FRUIT FOR JAM-MAKING, SEPTEMBER 1941  
Brimpton Women's Institute

meeting more than ever. To many harrassed housewives the institute was the one stabilising influence, the one thing which continued unchanged. For two hours every month they could forget household worries, and evacuees' dirty heads ; they could forget the war.

Some people felt that this was all wrong. What was the use of an organisation which made one forget the war ? There was no time for it. So they hustled on, rolling bandages, checking stores, rebilleting the unbilletable.

Others, and among them were the movement's staunchest supporters, felt that institutes had been born in the last war, they had grown to years of discretion

in the twenty years of peace, and now they were a body of sufficient size and standing to shoulder some special piece of war service. It did not satisfy them to say that women's institutes were a stabilising influence and a much needed recreation. They wanted something more positive.

But it was not nearly as easy as all that. Institutes are very strictly non-party and non-sectarian. Any war work to be undertaken must not offend the beliefs of Quaker members and yet must satisfy the belligerent and those who were sincerely disturbed at women's institutes not playing a sufficient part in the war effort.

When institutes were first introduced into England, the Ministry of Agriculture sponsored them largely because food was scarce. The Ministry realised that cottagers as well as kitchen-garden owners could make a substantial contribution to national food production. At the outbreak of the present war, the national federation reminded members of this and urged them to grow more food. But the obvious answer came back: "We already grow enough for ourselves. If we grow more, what happens to it? Who is going to take it five or ten miles to the nearest market?"

Some of the national federation executive were unconvinced that in villages a grow-more-food campaign would, in fact, produce a surplus. When there was a shortage of imported food stuffs, they argued, villages would be glad to have their own extra vegetables. Besides, in the past not all country people had appreciated a diet consisting largely of vegetables. School dinners in country districts have shown that many children are suspicious of almost all vegetables except cabbage and potatoes, onions and root vegetables. Spinach is nearly always looked upon with horror. Kale is often unknown, except for cows. Salads are for rabbit, not human, consumption. If school children could be taught to take a less prejudiced view then, it was argued, necessity might teach their elders too. So, better stocked village gardens would in fact mean more varied and healthier village menus, but it would not provide a surplus and help the towns.

Three years of war have proved both parties right. School children and their elders have learnt to be less suspicious of new vegetables and new ways with vegetables. But after satisfying an increased home demand, a surplus has been sent to W.I. markets in the nearest town or large village. These markets will be dealt with in a later chapter.

There is one garden product, however, not counting the uncontrollable lettuce, which regularly produces a glut every two or three years. Its glut season came round in 1940 and every gardener and his wife looked with mixed admiration and horror at the overloaded branches of their plum trees. No amount of thieving small boys nor ravenous visitors could cope with such a crop. Here was something which the country could preserve and hand over to the national food store. Here was the longed-for piece of war service.

Jam. It seemed the perfect solution. Jam-making was constructive and non-militant, if you liked to look at it that way. It accorded with the best Quaker traditions of feeding blockaded nations. For those who were diatetically minded,





**FRUIT BOTTLING**  
Demonstration to members of a Women's Institute

jam contained all the most highly prized vitamins. For those who were agriculturally minded, the scheme saved a valuable crop from literally rotting on the ground, and it encouraged better fruit cultivation—though not, one can only pray, of plums only. And for the belligerent, what could be more satisfying than fiercely stirring cauldrons of boiling jam and feeling that every pound took us one step further towards defeating Hitler?

Groups of W.I. jam makers, or preservation centres as they came to be called, sprang up all over the country. Some made jam in private garages, some in farm house kitchens; some in the domestic science room of the village school, or if they were lucky in a domestic science college; some hired a hall or shed and begged or borrowed oil stoves and preserving pans and worked from early morning until eleven o'clock at night.

There was no remuneration, except the feeling that here was national service freely given, something which needed doing, something which countrywomen with their traditional knowledge of jam-making could do and do well.

Headquarters bought the sugar, £1,400's worth of it. In three weeks it was redistributed to preservation centres all over England and Wales. Not a bad achievement for a voluntary organisation with a small staff.

Headquarters bought some canners too. This was a new idea to most villages. Before the war not more than perhaps a dozen villages had ever seen a hand-sealing machine. But with a countrywoman's quick appreciation of the practical, operators were soon found and taught and this trained nucleus toured from village to village, and by the end of the season had canned a hundred and fifty tons.

The total amount of preserves made in 1940 including jam, bottled and canned fruit, chutney and fruit pulp was roughly 1,631 tons. This was made by amateurs in improvised quarters and not one penny was paid to any one of that valiant company. The conditions under which it was made varied not only in the accommodation available but also in the amount of activity going on overhead. For this was the year of the Battle of Britain. The story of one of the East Kent institutes, Hawkinge, should go down to history.

Before the war it was a big institute, almost a suburban one. Some of its members lived in the neighbouring town. Some lived alongside the new aerodrome built on the top of the cliff. Soon after the war, even before the bombing began in earnest, most of its members had left. The well-to-do, leisured members had moved further inland. The houses skirting the aerodrome were evacuated. Only a few farmers and farm labourers and their families remained. Their work was there and there were animals to be fed even if bombs fell in the fields. By the summer of 1940, membership had fallen from a hundred and eight to five.

Five members and a canning machine. For in its more prosperous days, the institute had bought a canner. Now that its income had dropped to ten shillings a year, the county federation wrote offering to buy back the canner. Five members, all busy working women, could hardly be expected to make much use of it, thought the county.

But the institute wrote back a polite letter of refusal. They had bought that canner, they still had five members, and they meant to use it.

And use it they did. They picked their own fruit and the fruit from the gardens of their evacuated members. Their preservation centre was a farm kitchen, and they jammed and bottled and canned. The Battle of Britain raged overhead, so they took it in turns to go to the air raid shelter when the bombing was too intense. One day when the jam was on the boil, and a fresh lot of raiders roared overhead, the youngest member said to the others :

"You go this time. Go on. I'll stay and watch this boiling."

So she stayed and stirred and defied Nazidom.

"You see," she said afterwards, "they had children and I haven't."

But she didn't think she was doing anything spectacular. None of them did.

"We didn't think anything of it," they said. "We couldn't go away and do war work, and we thought, well, we could do *that*."

Apart from the sheer courage, imagine the labour involved ! There was the fruit to pick and carry to the kitchen. Then the washing and preparing, and after the preserves were made, the labelling and storage. For fuel, they carted their own wood, because they had no money. One day the same young member was leading her husband's cart and horse across the aerodrome back to her house.





PATCHWORK QUILT

Made by a member of a Yorkshire Institute



THRIFT RUG

Made from vegetable dyed woollen scraps by a member  
of a Shropshire Institute



Suddenly a German raider swooped down out of the clouds. Bombs fell on the aerodrome.

"What did you do?" someone asked her afterwards.

"What could I do?" she replied. "The horse was frightened but a couple of chaps from the hangars ran out to help me hold him. And then I went on."

Hawkinge preservation centre just went on too. At the end of the season when East Kent counted up the preserves made by its ninety odd institutes, Hawkinge appeared third on the list. Those five members had made 7 cwt. of jam and filled 7 cwt. of cans and a hundred bottles. People have sometimes asked why the jam made at W.I. centres could not have been made in factories. Some add that it would have been better jam and more economically made.

The instructions which went out to all preservation centres said that only surplus fruit was to be used, fruit which otherwise would have been wasted. If there was a jam factory within easy distance, and if it would accept the small quantities which individual members could pick from their gardens and hedges, then so much the better. There was no need of a preservation centre. Some factories were willing, particularly when foreign supplies were cut off, to buy four or five pounds at a time from cottage growers. Other factories did not see their way to deal with such small quantities. The great majority of villages have not got a jam factory near at hand.

The charge that jam would have been better made in jam factories has been answered by the increasing demand—in spite of trade prejudice—for W.I. jam. Each preservation centre, since the scheme was extended in 1941 to include non-institute members, is visited by a government inspector and the jam is tested. Sub-standard jam, which often means only a fault in appearance or texture, is taken off the market and sold at a reduced price to institutions.

In 1941 the jam scheme was changed and enlarged. It was no longer a spontaneous W.I. effort to save surplus fruit and add to the winter store of food. It became a government sponsored scheme, under the Ministry of Food. All the central administrative work was done by the national federation staff and in the counties by the county staff. In villages where there were institutes the work was done by the same band of volunteers supplemented by any non-members who cared to join.

In 1940, institute members were allowed to buy back their jam at wholesale price. By 1941, rationing had been introduced and there could be no privileges for anyone. Members brought their fruit and sold it to the centre at the fixed government price—a price often much below what they could have got for it as dessert fruit. They then gave their time to work at the centre and returned home in the evening or after as many hours as they could spare, tired, but not one penny the richer.

When the scheme was first suggested, there was considerable discussion. Would institute members be willing to give so much work at a busy time of the year? Jam-making in 1940 had been gruelling work, but at least everyone had got her share of cheap jam. Jam-making in 1941 was likely to be just as hard



DIGGING AND PLANTING  
A school for Produce Guild members

and she was to get nothing out of it at all—nothing except the knowledge that she was helping to increase the national food store. Would that be enough reward for the toil and sweat, the trouble of organisation, and the inevitable public criticism? No one need have worried. Explaining that scheme to meetings of hard-bitten furrowed countrywomen was an unforgettable experience.

“Will we get double rations?” the speaker would be asked.

“No, nothing. If we don’t do it there’ll be that much less jam in the country and the ration may have to be cut. But you won’t get any more out of it. You won’t,” and this was the bitterest pill, “even get your own fruit back in your ration, unless the village shop buys from the centre and you’re lucky. You’ll just be doing something—a great deal—for nothing.” Silence. Then, “Well, it’ll be our bit, won’t it?”

And that settled it.

Of course there were grumblers. But even the most hardened of them were not quite up to form over the 1941 jam scheme. It was too easy. There was really nothing to recommend the scheme except quite ridiculously idealistic motives.

The U.S.A. helped the preservation scheme by sending four mobile canning vans. They were given, licensed, insured and equipped by the American Federation of Business and Professional Women, and handed on by their British branch to the Women’s Institutes. Some were driven into the orchards so that the fruit





A MOBILE CANNING VAN GIVEN BY THE U.S.A.  
Hawkinge Women's Institute at work

could go straight from bough to can. Some were used in conjunction with a village hall. No American gift was ever more appreciated. "I thought it was just an expensive toy at first," said one member, after she had become an enthusiastic van fan.

It was much more than a toy. Painted grey, mounted on a Ford V8 chassis (and surely "V" was never more applicable!) they looked workmanlike and they were. Inside they were equipped with well arranged cupboards and shelves, a copper heated with Calor gas, and a zinc-lined sink. A trestle table which folded neatly away when the van was in motion held the hand-sealing machine. On the roof of the van stood the water tank.

This was the only piece of equipment which at first sight seemed ill chosen. There was something unco-operative about that tank. There it was in splendid isolation on the roof, and there, several yards away, was the village tap. How were the two to be brought together? The answer was found in that piece of war time equipment which has solved so many household problems, from washing the dog to spraying the fruit trees. A stirrup pump was produced and soon the tank was filled.

Canning at all times, even in a well ventilated kitchen, is an unsuitable occupation for those who like fresh air and a low, even temperature. But if you like dripping heat, cramped space and perspiring companions, then the inside of a canning van is just the place for you. First the water in the copper and the syrup

has to be heated. To encourage this, the large side window and the lower half of the door are closed. Then the cans are packed with carefully graded fruit, filled up with boiling syrup and sealed with nineteen brisk turns of the hand-sealing machine clamped to the table. If there is a queue for the copper, the newly sealed cans are wrapped up in a blanket as carefully as new born babes and put into a laundry basket to keep warm and wait their turn. As soon as there is room for them, fifteen cans are put in a net and dropped into the copper and from there, after the correct sterilizing period, they are lifted out and stood in cold water. The copper boils, the syrup boils, the steam rises hissing from the hot cans' last immersion, the walls drip with heat, and so, and more so, do the workers. Fifty cans an hour or one hundred pounds of jam a day is about the average achievement of a mobile canning unit.

The 1941 jamming season began with many forebodings. Following a year of glut, it was an all round bad fruit season. It was a gift to the grumblers. After forming all these new centres, they moaned, would there be any fruit to preserve, let alone surplus fruit? Some centres closed down, but 5,168 remained open. Members collected their garden fruit, which on their sugar ration they could never have used, and school children picked wild fruit. Parties were arranged for gathering blackberries, rose hips, elderberries and whortleberries. The result was that in spite of the bad season, 1,764½ tons of preserves were made in the centres, a thousand tons more than in the bumper crop season of the year before. Enough jam alone was made (not counting the bottles and cans) to supply the equivalent of a year's jam ration to nearly every institute member in England and Wales.

At the end of 1941, centres were asked whether they were prepared to open again the following year and whether there would still be a supply of volunteers to work them. A very large majority replied that they were.

Then, to many people's astonishment, a suggestion was made that preservation centres should become a regular feature of post-war village life. The suggestion even grew into a resolution at a council meeting. People remembered the waste of fruit there used to be in glut years. Perhaps too they thought that all this jamming and canning had had its good moments. It had been rather fun. And even the most experienced jam-makers had learnt something.

Preservation centres have dealt with fruit only, except for tomatoes which were canned in large numbers in some areas. The government frowns on the bottling and canning of vegetables except by pressure cooker, a method which is too expensive for small preservation centres and much too expensive for the average householder. If, after the war, villages are going to have communal preservation centres, it would seem a pity not to include vegetables as well as fruit. The institutes have asked the government to encourage its research stations to experiment in cheap, safe methods of preserving vegetables. There can be a glut of peas as well as plums, and small householders would welcome a cheap way of preserving a few summer vegetables for winter use.

The W.I. special war effort not only added to the national store of jam and preserved fruit, it also improved the standard of jam making in village homes,



and it has given women who could not leave their homes an opportunity to do vital national service. In the future it may lead to who knows what kind of communal village preservation centre or kitchen. Communal cooking, whether jam or dinners, was a new and much suspected idea three years ago. The idea has overcome opposition and taken root. It is growing slowly and naturally. Where will it end?



WOMEN'S INSTITUTE MARKET STALL  
Malton, Yorkshire

## MARKETS

W.I. markets, like the preservation centres, are run co-operatively. They were started long before there was any talk of jam. Lewes in Sussex was the first town to hold a market. Members from the surrounding institutes sent produce and took their turn at helping to set up the stall, sell, and pack up at the end of the day.

In 1931, the Ministry of Agriculture discussed with the N.F.W.I. executive committee the question of setting up markets all over the country. The Carnegie trustees made a grant towards the expenses of a marketing organiser and a drive was made to interest members in this new venture.

At the beginning of the war there were about a hundred W.I. markets in England and Wales. Some markets are put up once a week on market day in the square of the nearest town. Some are trestle tables in a shed or garage. Sometimes, instead of a stall, the marketing committee rents a small shop. Some of these are open twice a week.

Produce can be brought by any market share holder, and a share costs one shilling. Shareholders may be institute members, allotment holders, unemployed men, or, to quote the rules, "others who need help." Produce is priced by the controller who is in charge of the market and prices are regulated according to local current rates. No market is allowed to undercut neighbouring retailers. The producer, who is responsible for bringing his goods to the stall, is paid elevenpence in every shilling. The remaining penny goes towards the expenses of the market.

These expenses are very low because all the helpers are voluntary with the exception of the controller. As a rule she gets her bus fares and a small honorarium. Markets are also encouraged to pay out of pocket expenses of the treasurer and the bus fares of the sellers. The other main expenses are the repayment of the loan with which the stall was started and which paid for the scales, trays, table and so on. There is also the question of repairs, and of course in a shop, the usual overhead expenses.

Markets pay a half per cent of the turnover towards the national federation organisation. In return they get free visits and advice from the marketing organiser; and from time to time they can send their controller and other helpers to schools on grading and packing vegetables and fruit, trussing fowls, fruit preserving, book-keeping and other subjects which may be of use in their market life.

W.I. markets have a great variety of produce. Vegetables, fruit and flowers are the main source of income. Some markets sell rabbits and poultry, and before rationing was introduced, they sold eggs.

A story is told of one market which usually had a large supply of eggs. One morning, after most of the produce had arrived, and customers were beginning to crowd into the shop, there was an agitated telephone call. One of the producers who had just left eight dozen eggs was on the line.

"I don't know what you'll say" she said piteously to the controller, "but one of those eggs is hard boiled!"





A WOMEN'S INSTITUTE MARKET  
Produce is brought from neighbouring villages

No one knows what the controller thought. Nor even if she speculated on just why, on a particularly busy morning, one out of eight dozen eggs should be hard boiled. There and then she had to sit down in front of that eight dozen, and picking up each egg in turn, shake it gently, to see if it was solid or still as the hen had laid it.

Markets that sell rabbits have sometimes quite a lively morning. So did the market which sold puppies. It was a new and bright idea, but not, as it turned out, a very popular one. One of the puppies got loose, and ambling quietly away unnoticed had a delicious meal off the controller's hat before he was heartlessly dragged back to his basket and securely fastened in.

Cakes and scones are always popular, and are still sold sometimes in spite of rationing. So were jam and honey and bottled fruit when these were off the rations. Some people specialised in attractively labelled jars of dried herbs. Some sold home made face creams and lotions and shampoos. One market supplied shampoos for dogs as well as their owners.

The total turnover of W.I. markets is over £30,000 a year. The turnover of individual markets varies enormously. A small stall may be open only in the summer season, and may claim a £30 turnover. A big market, such as the one at Horsham, Sussex, has a turnover of £2,300. The two Oxfordshire markets, one in Oxford market and one at Banbury, paid £2,747 to their producers in 1941. Midhurst, West Sussex, paid £149 to its producers, and Colchester £770. No W.I. market has been closed down because of large undischarged debts. This may be partly due to the fact that all transactions are cash. But credit must also be given to the indefatigable organiser who travels many thousands of miles in the course of the year in order to cast a motherly eye on ailing markets, and give advice which has resulted in their steady increase.

The turnover is impressive for an undertaking which has never set out to make profits, but what is more remarkable is the individual's profit, and the effect that that profit has had on her or on him. Sometimes the profit is not very big, perhaps only three or four shillings a week. But those shillings are often the first money the amateur producer has ever earned, or has earned since she was married. It's the first money she can call her own and do just as she likes with it. She can spend it on herself or the children without wondering whether it ought not really to go back into housekeeping. She can buy a pair of new curtains, or a plant for the garden, or a present for Mum, and her conscience is clear that the money is hers to spend extravagantly or wisely as she likes.

If the producer is an unemployed man, well, those first shillings are earnings, real earnings, and maybe there'll be more next month.

Some producers make pounds not shillings, every month. One member, by her profits at the stall, was able to send her girl to the secondary school and pay for the longer train journey and for more expensive clothes and books. Another was able to pay for much needed help in her picturesque but labour-making farm house. The profits made by shareholders has done much more than put cash into their pockets. It has given them new self-esteem, new pleasures, new interests.





PAGE PAINTED BY A MEMBER OF A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

From a book illuminated by members of Women's Institutes  
and presented to their Chairman, Lady Denman, June 1937  
By courtesy of the Lady Denman, D.B.E.



*By courtesy of the Artist*

AN ESSEX VILLAGE: ONGAR HIGH STREET  
Water colour by E. Eason



Another thing that markets have taught is a higher standard of production. Like village jam makers, cottage gardeners and big house gardeners were apt to think they had nothing to learn because they had gardened all their lives and their fathers before them. But when they saw their carrots lying side by side with other people's carrots, they made comparisons. It was not, after all, it seemed, nonsense to say that good carrots should be straight carrots. True, nobbly carrots and split carrots had always tasted all right. But here were Mrs. Smith's carrots fetching a better price, and there was no getting away from it, they looked better and healthier.

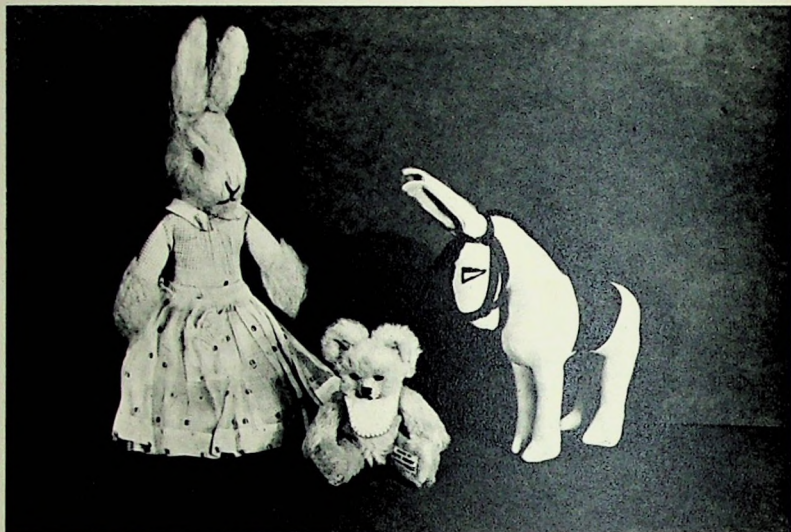
So, talks on vegetable production were listened to with a new interest. How to deal with pests, how to get more out of a limited space, these were subjects which now had an added value. People took pride in the look of their produce. They learnt how to pack their flowers and vegetables to send to market and to stand up to the journey, however unorthodox the method of transport.

Transport is one of the main difficulties of markets. There are generally buses on market days, but many shareholders live off the bus routes. The packed produce has to be carried and jolted over stiles and across fields, or down rough lanes. Good packing will make all the difference to its appearance on arrival.

Sometimes a farmer going into market will take a couple of baskets. Some of the produce arrives in prams, much by bicycle and some in pony carts. The controller has to cope with fruit, flowers and livestock arriving simultaneously in varying quantities and varying grades. A successful controller is a woman of infinite tact, good business ability and never failing resourcefulness and patience. And there are quite a number of successful controllers.

When new markets are first opened there is often a good deal of opposition from local retailers who suspect what they fear will be an unfair rival. But the opposition goes when they find that W.I. prices are no lower than anyone else's and that the result of holding the market is that a number of men and women have extra money to spend and they spend it, as a rule, in the same market town.

During the war, markets, like preservation centres, have had their troubles. A small north country town was visited by daylight raiders very inconsiderately on market day. The near-by Ack-Ack battery got into action and everyone took cover, everyone, that is, except the controller. She looked despairingly at the trays of vegetables which she had just graded and arranged. Spreading her arms over the stall, she murmured lovingly, "Oh ! my cabbages, my cabbages !" But worse was to come and all her maternal instincts availed nothing. The Ack-Ack battery arrived and took cover amongst the cabbages. The controller's desolation was complete.



TOYS  
Made by Women's Institute members

## HANDICRAFTS

**B**EFORE the war, W.I.'s were best known for the beautiful handicrafts practised by members. In fact if you mentioned institutes to a non-member, the reply as likely as not was :

"Oh ! yes, they do basket work, don't they ?" Or "patchwork," or whatever form of handicraft the speaker happened to have seen.

Pre-war institutes did a great deal more than crafts, just as war time institutes have done a great deal more than jam-making. But it is crafts, and in war time jam, which have chiefly brought them before the public eye.

A handicraft exhibition was held in London every three years in peace time. The last one was in October, 1938. It was a busy scene in the Royal Horticultural Hall on the first day of the judging. By nine o'clock the hall was full of hurrying women in cream coloured overalls. Boxes of different sizes and shapes were carried across the hall to the different stalls. Exhibits were sorted and later the different judges went their rounds and the purge began.

The task of organising the exhibition had been made an even more anxious one than usual by the uncertainty of the political situation. When the preparations for the exhibition were well in hand, Neville Chamberlain had gone to Munich,





CHARACTER DOLL : A PITBROW WORKER  
From the Women's Institutes Loan Collection

and with the possibility of war, the national federation stood to lose £1,000, that is the cost of hiring the hall, advance publicity, and the expenses of preliminary organisation. It was a gamble which was enough to give any organising secretary sleepless nights. But the arrangements had gone ahead in orderly fashion as though no world crisis impended. The opening day arrived and the gamble was justified.

The organisation of the exhibition did not depend merely on lighthearted speculation. There was a detailed timetable and a careful budget. Although the national federation did not run this triennial show for profit, they were naturally unwilling to suffer financial loss. So the budget for £3,000 allowed for a profit



SHOES MADE FROM FELT HATS AND DECK CHAIR CANVAS  
The work of a member of a Dorset Institute

of £80, to be on the safe side. When the accounts were finally closed, the secretary had the satisfaction of seeing that she had underestimated the profits by £20.

To be efficient there has to be an element of ruthlessness about good organisation. But even the most competent officials sometimes have unexpectedly soft spots.

After all the judging was finished and the stall dressers were busy arranging the displays, an old lady walked slowly into the hall carrying a heavy parcel. She unpacked it carefully on an upturned packing case and drew out the model of a piece of agricultural equipment, carved in wood and gaily painted. Lovingly she put it on the empty corner of a trestle table just beside her, facing the entrance.

"What are you doing with that?" said an official coldly. "Don't you know the judging is over? You should have brought it yesterday."

The old woman sat down without a word. One by one tears welled up in her wrinkled old eyes and trickled down her cheeks. Something inside the official welled up too and engulfed her orderly efficiency.

"Well, you leave it there and we'll say nothing about it, shall we?"

They nodded at each other guiltily and slunk off before they could be caught by judges and experts. The unjudged, uncatalogued, wholly unorganised exhibit remained defiantly on its corner table. Two days later it was the first thing that a visiting Cabinet minister stopped to look at. And he was not the only one.

The artistic side of the exhibition was in the hands of the handicraft committee, particularly the chairman and the two handicraft organisers. One of these besides being able to do and teach most crafts had done research work in her spare time. She made a study of traditional local designs and introduced them into the work she demonstrated. Durham miners' wives learnt to use the Durham feather





EMBROIDERY AND CHILD'S CHAMOIS LEATHER SHOES  
From the Women's Institutes Loan Collection

design when they worked their quilts. Feather patterns had been used continuously for hundreds of years in the north of England. But one form had been forgotten over here although it was being used in America. The handicraft organiser reintroduced this to her classes. Flat linen quilting, worked with back stitch or chain stitch, was another forgotten craft, and this too was revived.

Looking at the exhibits, visitors often doubted that such exquisite work could have been done by village women. Perhaps they forgot Honiton and Buckingham lace makers, and thought that like tapestry, fine craftsmanship was the perquisite of the lady of the manor. At the exhibition, many of the craftswomen served at

the stalls which showed their craft. The maker of a beautiful pink silk quilt sat beside her work and glowed with pride when the Queen stopped in her tour to admire it. She was a Durham woman, wife of a miner, and one of the finest quilt makers in the kingdom. How Durham women manage to keep their work spotlessly clean will always remain a mystery to southerners.

The incredulous, when they have been convinced that exhibits are true products of all the members' work and not only of the leisured few, sometimes go on to ask what use a pink quilt or a richly embroidered linen cloth can be in a small cottage, still less in a soot-ridden mining village.

It is of course partly a question of whether the value of something created is to be judged by its practical use. The value to the owners of those quilts and linen embroideries is undoubted. Not many exhibits were for sale, although all exhibitors could sell their work if they wished. They preferred to keep it. Their work had more value in their eyes than cash payments. Those embroideries represented hours of patient labour. Some were the first non-utilitarian and beautiful things that their owners had made. Their creation had given infinite pleasure and a sense of triumphant achievement. Their making had trained eye and hand, and taught a new conception of art as "thoughtful workmanship."

The exhibition showed as much variety in crafts as there is variety in members. There were patchwork quilts made of the tails of husbands' shirts or bits of old cotton overalls. There was a marionette show which gave an almost continuous performance to the accompaniment of a gramophone. There was furniture and leatherwork; vegetable dyeing and spinning and weaving; rushwork and basketwork; toys and rugs; and in the middle of the room Lady Denman's book.

Lady Denman's book was a present to their chairman given by the institutes on the twenty-first anniversary of their introduction to England. Some pages are a co-operative effort, some are the work of one local artist; but each illustrates the special activities of its own county and local places of fame or beauty. Members visiting the exhibition saw it complete for the first time. They rushed to turn the pages, not to see what others had done, or not until later, but to pore lovingly over their own county page.

"Well, Ah never thought Ah'd coom oop to Lon'on to see our page!" a buxom member was heard to say. Owing to her dimensions, no one else could stand near enough to see much, but it was a pleasure just to watch that glowing face.

In war time, skilled needlewomen have to put by their bags of pieces for patchwork while they sew on patches of a less decorative order. Knitting, wearisomely for some and feverishly for others, takes the place of more amusing crafts. There is unfortunately little room for initiative and beauty in Army socks and no room for variety, except at the price of footsore soldiers. But the training of eye and hand which handicraft classes have given is not wasted. Some members have helped to make fur-lined coats for Russians; many have made camouflage nets for tanks. The number of make-and-mend parties for evacuees has been endless. Material was often supplied by the U.S.A. and the labour was largely supplied by institute members.





MAKING FUR COATS FOR RUSSIA  
A Women's Institute working party

Schools for thrift crafts have taken the place of schools of a less utilitarian order. Members have learnt how to make felt slippers out of old felt hats and odd remnants. They have learnt—and this is the most important part—to make slippers which are not horrors of debased slovenliness but blockheeled and well fitting, fit to catch the fancy of the most fastidious. There have been schools for renovations, too, very popular in these coupon days. And recently a school was held for household jobbery.

This was a new venture. The woman who can use her hands deftly in peacetime to make a petit point chair cover or a rug or a leather bag, can generally learn how to use a saw and a hammer too. Carpentry is taught to every boy at his village school and most boys at their preparatory or public school. But it is seldom taught to girls. Yet in her own home, a woman would be very glad to know the right way to put up shelves, to mend the leg of a chair, or to fix a plate rack. She would be very glad to have hints on how to do simple electrical repairs, if she is lucky enough to have electricity, or how to mend leaky taps, if she has any taps. These are the kind of thing which are left out of a girl's education. Institutes are taking steps towards making up the deficiency.

## THE FUTURE

**A**MONG its recommendations for "revivification of country areas," the Scott report says that "the cardinal problem is how to refocus cultural life within the village itself. For the women, the women's institutes have shown in recent years how much can be done in this direction." Institutes have taught countrywomen to be articulate, they have taught citizenship and they have revived forgotten crafts. As one member said, "The institute, it does broaden you." Its self-government has taught practical democracy, its classes and lectures have given members an opportunity to look beyond their village and beyond English shores. Recently the growth of interest in other countries has been remarkable. Members no longer want chatty talks by out-of-date tourists. They want to know about modern everyday life in other countries and modern problems. Some institutes are learning a foreign language. Debates on the value of teaching modern languages in elementary schools always produce a large number and often a majority of supporters, although only a very small number of the debaters speak any foreign language. Members are well aware that a better world can only be built on co-operation not isolation. Many hundreds of members have letter friends in different parts of the British Empire and in the U.S.A., and those who had them in European countries look forward to renewing their friendship after the war. Women's institutes have taught citizenship in the widest sense.

The test time for the institutes is going to come after the war. Tired elderly members will have to make room for demobilised younger members, not to be replaced by them but to work alongside them. We shall want the wider experience and different outlook of the younger members as well as the maturer wisdom of older women if peace time villages are to be living units, not crumbling relics. Democracy has been well taught and practised in institutes, and when peace comes there will be 300,000 women ready to say loudly and clearly that since country people are "custodians of a heritage" that heritage must be living, not embalmed. It must be drained and electrified, equipped with modern school buildings and an adequate school staff; it must have up-to-date health services and recreational facilities; and working women must be given a fair chance to take their part in planning and in building the village life of the future.





# BRITAIN IN PICTURES

## THE BRITISH PEOPLE IN PICTURES

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